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Sister Minnie Wood

Claire Chatterton



Fig. 5: University of Salford ©

In last year's bulletin I wrote about an inspirational First World War Nurse, Minnie Wood (Chatterton, 2016) and described her war service for which she was awarded an OBE, the Royal Red Cross (2nd and 1st class) and a Military Medal, for bravery whilst nursing under enemy bombardment during the Battle of Passchendaele (Hallett, 2017). At the end of my article I noted that she had left the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service in 1924 and said, *'at this point the trail has gone cold and I am still trying to find out what happened to her and when she died.'* I am pleased to report that I have since been contacted by two people, Kathryn Adams and Julie Davey, who have helped me to fill in some of the gaps in my research and correct an inaccuracy. Kathryn Adams is Minnie's great niece, the granddaughter of Minnie's brother, Harold (whom I mistakenly had thought had died in infancy). Julie Davey is a former nurse and genealogist.

Thanks to them, I now know that Minnie Wood did live well into old age, dying in 1967 at the age of 86. She had been living on the West Sussex coast, at Rustington near Littlehampton, and her funeral was held at the crematorium in Brighton. According to her obituary in the local paper, she had been a leading member of the Rustington branch of the Women's section of the Royal British Legion. Her obituary in 'The Times' on March 18th 1967 said,

'WOOD- On 12th March 1967, Minnie WOOD O.B.E. (Military), Royal Red Cross (First Class), M.M., Q.A.I.M.N.S., Matron (retired). A gallant and gracious lady whose memory is treasured by all who were privileged to know her. She was the loving and loved friend and companion of the late Mrs W. Scott Forbes and her two sisters for 58 years. Cremation took place 17th March.'

It seems that after her military nursing service and possibly caring for her elderly parents, she became a companion to a widow, Victoria Alexandrina Scott Forbes, and Mrs Scott Forbes' two sisters (Caroline and Susan Hopper), whom Minnie first met during her nursing days at the Salford Royal Hospital before the First World War. The three women were the daughters of a Manchester businessman, Thomas J. Hooper, a Pattern Card Manufacturer. Victoria had married the owner of a calico printing business, William Scott Forbes in 1883. He was a local politician in Eccles, becoming the Mayor there, and was also a magistrate. The couple later moved to London where William died in 1919. Passenger lists from the late 1920s and 1930s show Minnie travelling to Europe and back with Mrs Scott Forbes and in 1939 the two women can be found on the Register (with Minnie's surname misspelled as Wool) staying in a hotel in Penzance. Mrs Scott Forbes died in 1947 and it appears that

Minnie then retired to the Sussex coast, where she was to live for a further twenty years.

It is good to be able to know more about this interesting nurse and very grateful thanks to Kathryn Adams, Julie Davey, Sarah Rogers, James McInnes and Lucy London for their help.

Sister Catherine Black: 'King's nurse, Beggar's nurse.'

Claire Chatterton



Fig. 6: Source – Sue Light
<http://greatwarnurses.blogspot.co.uk>

While doing some research into facial injury during the First World War, I came across some memoirs written by a nurse, Catherine Black. She had written these in 1939 and gave them the intriguing title of 'King's nurse, Beggar's nurse.' The title of her book reflects her varied career. Perhaps best known as the private nurse of King George V, whom she nursed until his death in 1935 and who called her 'Blackie', she also worked with patients from across the social classes during a varied and interesting nursing career.

References

Chatterton, C (2016) Sister Minnie Wood. *The Bulletin of the UK Association for the History of Nursing*. 5, 81.

Hallett, C (2017) *Nurses of Passchendaele*. Barnsley, Pen and Sword Books.

She was born in Ireland, in Ramelton, County Donegal, in 1878. The eldest of six children she grew up in what she later described as a 'fairly prosperous household'. Her father, Moses Black, ran a draper's shop. She said that the desire to become a nurse was there from her childhood ('while still a child playing with my dolls') but it wasn't easy to persuade her family to let her go and train (she described it as a 'long and hard battle'). Turned down by the City of Dublin Hospital after an unsuccessful interview, she turned to the adverts in 'The Hospital Magazine' and successfully applied to a hospital in a seaside town in England (which she anonymises as 'Southgate') where she was accepted to nurse patients with TB and lupus. After two and a half years in what she described as an understaffed and busy establishment she applied and was accepted as a probationer at The London Hospital, starting her training in 1903 at the age of 25.

Her descriptions of her time at The London are rich and evocative. She talks of the famous Matron, Eva Luckes and she recounts the long hours they worked, '*we were called at 6am, breakfasted at 6.30am ... and anyone who was five minutes late got a black mark. Five black marks in a quarter and you lost one of your cherished days off. Into the wards at 7am, on duty until 9.20pm.*' Her accommodation was in some dilapidated houses at the back of the hospital known as the 'Rabbit Warren', which were cold and damp.